



Mount Calvary Connected

February 2, 2023

Mount Calvary Connected is a weekly newsletter sent out at the end of each week. Our goal is to keep you connected to your church and your faith with messages from our pastors, information about upcoming activities at Mt. Calvary and more!

Pastor Jonathan Adams

Cell-Phone: 412-817-6704

Email: revjonoadams@gmail.com

LIVE STREAMING WORSHIP SERVICE INFORMATION

Mt. Calvary hosts live broadcasts of the liturgy at 8:45 AM Sunday mornings. The broadcast can be heard by tuning your radio to 88.3 FM if you are near the church. We also stream these services live over the internet. Simply visit www.mt-calvarylutheran.org and click "Live Radio Broadcast" from the home page on Sunday mornings.

Weekly worship bulletins can be found at: www.mt-calvarylutheran.org/bulletins/

Readings & Sermon from the Past Sunday

Listen to the readings and the sermon from this past Sunday on our website: <https://www.mt-calvarylutheran.org/sermons/>

A Message from Pastor Jonathan Adams

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

Even with Pastor Scott well on his way to Arizona by now, we continue to be in the very earliest stages of transition, but I will assure you once more: your congregational leaders are absolutely working in earnest to set and follow a vision of what the next steps are for Mount Calvary.

I wanted to take a moment today to cover some very practical matters about our current steps:

For the most immediate future, I will be serving in the role of your primary pastor at Mount Calvary, but, it's important to remember that I am still only technically part-time. My time at Mount Calvary is shared by and with your partners at Benscreek Lutheran Church in Somerset County, and even in the midst of transition here, I still have responsibilities to the people there.

Your church council has affirmed a desire to have me available to cover the most essential duties of the pastoral office: preaching and leading worship, pastoral care, funerals, and more general oversight of the

church and its ministries. There will certainly be weeks where those “simple” tasks consume most of my available time, and thus we are actively working on developing volunteers to cover some things that might have previously been done either by myself or Pastor Scott.

For the time being, my office hours at Mount Calvary will continue to be Mondays and Wednesdays, typically from 10am-3pm; I am also available to meet with folks outside of those hours by appointment. With worship responsibilities on both Saturday and Sunday, I try to honor Friday as a day of rest, but understand that even that must be sacrificed from time to time.

If you need to reach me, I will readily accept calls to my cellphone (412-817-6704) during regular working hours, or 24/7 if it is truly an emergency. I simply ask that if it is non-urgent, that you consider leaving a message at the church office, or sending an email (RevJonoAdams@gmail.com). Our church secretary Terrie Crisi will continue to staff the office Monday through Thursday from 9am-1pm and will be in communication with me to pass along messages as needed.

I look forward to continuing to build and deepen relationships with those of you I’ve served with here over the past three years. Together, we will continue to be the Body of Christ at Mount Calvary Lutheran Church.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Jonathan

Upcoming Meetings/Events

Evangelism Committee – Thursday, Feb. 2nd at 6:30 pm
Coffee Social - Sunday, Feb. 5th 8-8:45 am
Property Committee - Tuesday, Feb. 7th at 6:00 pm
Charcuterie Event - Saturday, Feb. 11 at 1:00 pm
Social Ministry - Thursday, Feb. 16th at 6:30 pm
Pancake Breakfast - Sunday, Feb. 18th from 7-11 am
Liturgical Jazz at First Lutheran Church, Johnstown - Sunday, Feb. 19th at 3:00 pm
WELCA - Monday, Feb. 20th at 6:00 pm
Alpha begins! - Tuesday, Feb. 21st at 6:00 pm
Church Council - Tuesday, Feb. 21st at 6:30 pm
Alpha - Week 2 - Tuesday, Feb. 28th at 6:00 pm

Coffee Social

The evangelism team hosts a coffee hour the first Sunday of every month from 8 a.m. - 8:45 a.m. Please join us on Sunday, February 5th for refreshments and fellowship!

Reminder!

If you previously registered for the Charcuterie Board Class, please remember to bring your registration fee and join us for an afternoon of fun with food on Saturday, February 11th at 1:00 p.m.

Who wants pancakes?!

Join us for fun and fellowship on Saturday, February 18th from 7 a.m. – 11 a.m. at Mount Calvary Lutheran Church. For only \$7, you will receive 2 sausage patties or bacon, pancakes, and your choice of beverages. If you are bringing guests under the age of 12, breakfast is only \$5!

Jazz Program

First Lutheran Church, Johnstown, is pleased to present Deanna Witkowski, jazz liturgical pianist in a program of sacred jazz music, original compositions, and hymns on Sunday, February 19, 2023, at 3:00 p.m. in the First Lutheran Church sanctuary.

Join us for an inspiring afternoon!

Got Questions? Try Alpha!

Alpha is an 11 week course that's been developed to help you build a closer relationship with our savior. Each session focuses on a different question centered around faith. There's no studying and no homework, it's even okay if you miss a week, it's as simple as dinner and a movie!

Registration is open and classes begin on Tuesday, February 21st at 6:00 p.m. Register today!

Scheduled Worship Help

Ushers:

To Be Announced

Readers/Communion Assistants:

February 4 – Bill Layton & Jan Layton

February 5 – Randy Whetzel

February 11 – Todd Moss & Jack Weisbrodt

February 12 – MaryBeth Heinze

February 18 – Cindy Buday & Courtney Haluska

February 19 – Laura Bower

February 25 – Cindy Solarczyk & Kevin Oleksa

February 26 – Ray Leverknight

Those interested in volunteering may contact Pastor Jonathan to sign up.

2023 Offering Envelopes Available in the Narthex

The envelope numbers changed from the prior year. Those who donate apart from an envelope should make note of their new number. Those who presently don't have envelopes, but desire them, should contact the church office.

Keep in Touch!

After a weekend filled with celebration, Pastor Scott embarked on his journey to Surprise, Arizona but would love to hear from YOU!

Please feel free to keep in touch:

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May God bless his new journey!

Did Jesus tell us to pray for our enemies?

by Nijay K. Gupta

Shortly before standing trial for contempt of Congress, Steve Bannon, former White House chief strategist for President Trump, recorded an episode of his War Room podcast in which he vowed to vindicate himself and humiliate his critics. "Pray for our enemies, okay?" he said. "Because we're going medieval on these people. We're going to savage our enemies. So pray for them. Who needs prayers? Not MAGA, not War Room, and certainly not Stephen K. Bannon."

While Bannon is known for many things, being overtly religious is not one of them. He was raised Catholic, but he's not the kind of person one would expect to quote the Bible. Yet he did just that in this unscripted moment. Bannon made no reference to Jesus or the Gospels, but the phrase "pray for our enemies" combines the two halves of Matthew 5:44: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Jesus had a tendency to speak in aphorisms and to reinforce themes in parallel but not identical statements. In the Gospels, "enemies" is a generic label for people who stand on the other side of an issue. "Persecutors," on the other hand, are people who harass you, who go out of their way to cause you trouble. "Love your enemies" reflects the broad theme of compassion and care for people in an opposing group, while "pray for those who persecute you" is a practical outworking of the love command. Jesus is asking something very difficult of his disciples: love those people who are on the opposite side of the issues that matter to you, and pray for those individuals who are determined to do you harm.

Bannon's mash-up of these two biblical phrases happened in a stream-of-consciousness tirade. But he isn't the first person to conflate them. There is a long history of the phrase "pray for your enemies" being used to sum up Jesus' message.

Christian writers started using the phrase as early as the Didache, a collection of church teachings that likely dates to the end of the first century, just decades after Jesus' earthly ministry. The beginning of the Didache presents the Christian way of life, repeating the two love commandments: love of God and love of neighbor. As an elaboration, the text paraphrases bits from the Sermon on the Mount: "Bless those who curse you, and pray for your enemies" (1:3). As the Didache recalls Jesus' teaching in concise form, it collapses "persecutors" and "enemies" into one group: those people on the other side.

Other early Christian writers followed suit. Clement of Alexandria (150–ca. 215) uses this same phrasing in his instruction on caring for neighbors. In a portion of his miscellaneous teachings, he quotes various sayings of Jesus about showing mercy and offering forgiveness. Christians, Clement claims, ought not to rejoice when a pesky neighbor is sick or gloat when a troublemaker has fallen on hard times; they should "pray for their enemies." The posture of the Christian toward a hostile person is not vengeance but rather to do whatever is necessary to inspire them toward goodness.

Justin Martyr (100–165) likewise promotes enemy love in his First Apology. He encourages skeptics of Christianity to look at the lives of believers, observing their change of attitude and behavior after their conversion. Formerly they were full of hate, intent on rivalry, but now they seek unity with all: far from looking for a fight, Christians "pray for our enemies," wanting all to share in the good things of the gospel. On the subject of love, Justin quotes from Matthew 5, but his wording is imprecise, as if from a fuzzy memory: "If you love them that love you, what new thing are you doing? For even fornicators do this. But I say to you, pray for your enemies, and love them that hate you, and bless them that curse you, and pray for them that spitefully use you."

Luther, Calvin, and Bonhoeffer each use "pray for your enemies" to summarize Jesus' teachings as well. The Christian tradition seems to be especially focused on softening our hearts toward others—not just persecutors, who embody the direct and hostile outworking of enemies who wish harm upon us, but any person or group with whom we might naturally have friction.

Bannon's use of the phrase piqued my interest because he uttered it like something you might hear as the battle cry before launching a holy war. He was clearly inviting prayer as a curse or a condescending exhortation, as in, Pray for God's mercy on our enemies, because we are going to brutalize them! This sort of prayer reinforces the dividing line between "us" and "them." Jesus' radical statement was quite the opposite—Love your enemies, and pray for a tidal wave of God's blessings on those very people whom you think are the absolute worst.

But what exactly did Jesus mean when he taught about loving enemies? It didn't take long in the early history of Christianity for Matthew's Gospel to become the church's favorite book, in large part because of the material that includes the teachings of Jesus. The crown jewel is the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus lays out the ethos of the kingdom of God.

An early section of the sermon focuses on dealing with enemies (Matt. 5:38–48). The Hebraic philosophy of an eye for an eye (Lev. 24:19–21) holds to a standard of equal and fair treatment, in which the punishment fits the crime, but Jesus, as a fastidious student of Torah, takes it further by promoting a personal lifestyle

of generosity. Turning the other cheek means showing extra generosity toward others, even and especially toward your enemies. In the world in which Jesus lived, it was common to hear the motto, “Love your friend, hate your enemy,” a refrain that sounds all too familiar today. But Jesus calls for the love of every neighbor, whether friend or foe. This was not a welcome idea for many. Is it wise to blur the lines of purity and righteousness? They might have said to him, thinking of Psalm 1. Should we carelessly keep company with the wicked?

Jesus points to the example of the heavenly Father, who bestows the warming sun and refreshing rain on all mortals, not just the worthy few. Loving your friends is easy, Jesus says—anyone can do that. It requires no maturity, no labor, no planning or forethought. It is human nature to do good to the people you like. But true greatness requires uncommon charity: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Perfection here does not mean free of any flaw or error. The kind of perfection Jesus calls for is about pursuing a pure love for all, as God loves all.

The point of this passage from the sermon is precisely to erase the lines we draw between the friendly neighbor (who is easy to love) and the enemy or persecutor (who is hard to love). The reality of life is that there will be people who will irritate you and who are hard to get along with. There are people who will relish your misery and want to see you fail.

This scenario comes up later in a parable (Matt. 13:24–29). Jesus compares the kingdom to a field where good seed was planted. At night an “enemy” snuck into the field and planted weeds. Jesus presents this as just the way things are: sometimes you will have a rival farmer who wants to choke out your crops. The way of Christian perfection is not to take revenge on them but to have compassion for them. To want good for them rather than evil shows the power of love.

Luke’s Sermon on the Plain also contains a love teaching of Jesus. “Love your enemies,” Jesus says, “do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you” (Luke 6:27–28). Here, Jesus is even clearer that praying for enemies is about loving them. In fact, this version of Jesus’ teaching implies that the prayer should be one of blessing, not cursing. Put another way, Jesus’ call to pray for enemies is a call to regard them as friends, not foes.

Looking at the whole of Jesus’ teachings, we can boil enemy prayer down to three things. First, pray with compassion. Jesus repeatedly emphasizes the importance of extending forgiveness, releasing the sinner from guilt, and showing clemency for wrongdoing. This does not mean wrongdoing shouldn’t have consequences. But Jesus’ famous teaching about turning the other cheek is less about forsaking justice and more about showing forbearance with compassion. To pray for one’s enemies is to pray with love for them, seeing the humanity in them.

Second, pray for abundance. The example of God, according to Jesus, is the divine inclination toward grace and giving in abundance (Matt. 5:45; Luke 6:35–36). To pray for our enemies is to wish—even if it seems wrong—that God would shower them with good things. This is essential to the kingdom’s call to love. Hate treats the other as the object of our scorn; love sees the other as a creature, made by God with care.

Finally, pray for change for the good. It is appropriate that enemy prayer should include praying that the other might change. While Jesus preached love, he didn’t avoid calling out his opponents on their hypocrisy, elitism, greed, or vanity. But even when Jesus was at his most stern and seemingly hostile, his

wider intent was to see change happen for the blessing and benefit of all. He practiced what he preached when he said, “Do good to those who hate you” (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27).

None of this is easy. The New Testament occasionally talks about prayer as a form of wrestling (e.g., Col. 4:12). In this way, prayer is sometimes depicted as a theater of battle, as spiritual powers at war with the believer in the thick of it. This prayer-wrestling implies that supplication is often a laborious activity. (Recall the difficulty of Jacob’s wrestling with God!) We go to war with the devil when we pray for gospel glory and kingdom victories, Paul says to the Ephesians (6:10–20).

Praying for our enemies and persecutors is meant to be difficult work. It doesn’t always feel good or seem right. It requires an enlightened way of thinking about those we dislike (or even hate). To pray for them as Jesus would is to pray with love, with compassion, with holy goodness.

This is an ideal, one that sometimes seems unfathomable. Can we really expect a survivor of violence or abuse to pray that God would bless the person who harmed them? Sometimes the right thing to do is just wrestle openly and honestly before God: I cannot love, show me how to do good little by little. Paul talks about how the Spirit can help us when words fail us in prayer—with sighs and groans that express the depths of our spiritual agony (Rom. 8:26). What matters most is a soft heart before God and openness to being changed by the kingdom ways modeled by the Son of God and Son of man.

Jesus may not have commanded his disciples, “pray for your enemies,” in those specific words, but he intended for them to do just that. As with his dying breath he uttered, “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34), so he held out hope for a more generous world. To pray “to hell with them” is human. To pray “give me love for them and show them mercy” is divine.

Nijay K. Gupta is professor of New Testament at Northern Seminary. His books include *Paul and the Language of Faith* and *A Beginner’s Guide to New Testament Studies*.

Original article published online at: [Did Jesus tell us to pray for our enemies? | The Christian Century](#)

Birthdays & Anniversaries

February 5 – February 11, 2023

Anniversaries

None

Birthdays

Feb. 5 - Louis Horn

Feb. 6 - Jacob Brandau, Thomas Donaldson, Jean Pellon, & Sara Whetzel

Feb. 7 - Robert Colvin, Robert Culp, Luke Tunnison, & Michael Zerby

Feb. 9 - Helen LaTulippe

Feb. 10 - William Nihoff

Feb. 11 - Jacqueline Cassidy & Debra Sarlouis

Remember those that prayer has been requested for:

Linda & Dick, Claudia Plows, Maddie Pierce, Gladys Haupt, Bill & Linda, Jose & Family, Dave, Tom, Lt. Hunter Bergman, and Lt. Dylan Merchant, Harold, Rick, Shirley, Debbie, David, Lauren, Billy, Barb, Sara Solarczyk, Jackie Janak, Jack, Corinne, Joan, Dan, Natalie Zerby, Pastor Scott Custead, Luella Koontz, Al Lindner & Family, Bob, Dawn, Stacy & Josh, Bob Trotter, Bill Layton, Deb Zilch, Bennett, Cassy Sojak, Paul Miller, Keith Mayket, Ruth, Pete, Teplitza Family, Ken, John Nerone, Dane Wisner, Jeff, Irene, Karen, Erin, Susan Dyers, Bob McMullen, Wyatt George, Larry Hockensmith, Jean Pellon, Mike, Corey, Pastor Jonathan & Family, Roxanne Horner, Miriam Horner, Becky Lilja, Kathy P., Al Johnson, Chris, Donna & Danny, Cheryl, Jennifer & Family, Jaime, Matt & Ashley, Landon, Linda Haberkorn, Lorraine, Joe, Donna, Danny & Family, Becky Jo, Bill, Linda & Family, Mary, Mary Jane, Janice, Rick, Don, Mabel Ann, Betty, Cathy, Cindy, Jill, Theresa & Family, Dean, Madi & Family, Patty & Family, Sydney & Family, Paulette, Ron, Andrea, Mary Ann, Midge, Rayford, Lois A., Nicole, Trent, Kyle, Anna, Beverly, Sondra, El Warshel, Audrey Rubis, Carol, Katey, Janice, Trina & Family, Jake Wissinger, Candi Walker, Dave Brehm, Chrissy-Baby Emma, Wyatt, Gerald Barrick, the Shreffler Family, Louise, Kim, Devin, Laura & family, Dorothy, Jo Ann, John Alt, Jan Mertz, Denny, Jill Lisson, Jaci, Dominic Megia, Jackie Hauger, Sharon, Barbara, Louise & Family, Dennis, Mary M., Joel Penrod, Tim Miller, Cathy T., Paul Brodt, Kim Stayrook, Alan, Pastor David Louder, Frank Robison, Sandy, Louise, Brooke and Bill, Chuck, Dawn, Cherie, Sandy, Lorrie, & Bill, Jamie Bloom, Nancy Moore.

Condensed Worship
Saturday, January 28, 2023 & Sunday, January 29, 2023
On Earth as in Heaven

Prayer of the Day

P: Holy God, you confound the world's wisdom in giving your kingdom to the lowly and the pure in heart. Give us such a hunger and thirst for justice, and perseverance in striving for peace, that in our words and deeds the world may see the life of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

A: Amen.

First Reading: Micah 6:1-8

Hear what the Lord says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel. "O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, what Balaam son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the Lord." "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

P: The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God.

Psalmody: Psalm 15

P: Lord, who may dwell in your tabernacle? Who may abide upon your holy hill?

A: Those who lead a blameless life and do what is right, who speak the truth from their heart;

P: they do not slander with the tongue, they do no evil to their friends;
they do not cast discredit up- on a neighbor.

A: In their sight the wicked are rejected, but they honor those who fear the Lord.

They have sworn upon their health and do not take back their word.

P: They do not give their money in hope of gain, nor do they take bribes against the innocent.

Those who do these things shall never be overthrown.

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

P: The word of the Lord,

A: Thanks be to God.

Gospel: Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

P: The gospel of the Lord,

A: Praise to you, O Christ!

Sermon by Pastor Jonathan

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from Christ Jesus our Lord who calls us out to play. Amen.

“Sometime during your childhood, you went out to play with your friends for the last time, and didn’t even know it.”

That’s one of those profound thoughts that can really punch you in the gut.

Because it’s absolutely true.

The last time I went outside to play with my neighborhood friends passed by without any known recognition, not a single passing memory. But what I do remember, is all those times we went out to play before that...

The neighborhood I grew up in had the perfect, quintessential “sand lot.” It was almost dead center of the neighborhood, an acre of flat, clear grass. The owners of a nursing home in our neighborhood had bought it to allow room for future expansion, and they kept it mowed and were fine with us playing there.

It was perfect for football, or baseball, two sports that I was never particularly good at.

It would’ve been fine for soccer, too, but I was the only kid in our neighborhood who played it.

Whenever I was invited out, I would join the team, I would play football or baseball even though I didn’t have the hand-eye coordination to be good at it. I played with my friends and my neighbors.

And every time they were looking to get a game started, even though they knew that I was just about the worst athlete in the neighborhood, one or two would show up at my door and ring the doorbell, “hey, we’re going to be playing football at the lot this afternoon, do you want to come?”

They’d always invite me.

And believe it or not, when we made it there and picked teams, they made sure the way we picked those teams was fair. And even though I was not the best at football or baseball, I was never picked last.

For years, we gathered at the lot and we played. Until one day we didn't. I couldn't tell you when that last time was, it just sort of happened.

But for all of the time that we did play, it was meaningful, it was fun, it was a great way to get some exercise and enjoy playing a game and learning the rules of football that I didn't understand. I learned a lot playing with my friends.

But I think maybe the most important thing that I learned was the thing that I didn't realize until much later...

Like I said, I was always invited. They always made sure to send one or two kids to the end of my street to ring my doorbell to make sure I was there. I was always included on a team, because if they didn't have nearly every kid in the team playing, they wouldn't have enough for a good game of football or baseball. We needed everyone involved, no matter what their gifts or skills were.

That's kind of different from the way we generally assume that the world works. Normally, whenever people are picking teams, they immediately try to pick the best and brightest and they leave out the people they don't see as valuable.

But that's not what Jesus taught. That's not what Paul taught. Today we hear our semi-annual reading of the beatitudes, this reminder that there are people that are blessed that we wouldn't necessarily normally think of. And even though Paul was not specifically speaking about this teaching of Jesus when he taught what we hear from him in 1st Corinthians, it's the same idea: God chooses people who we least expect. God chose the foolish, God chose the weak, God chose the lowly.

God picks the sorts of people that we wouldn't expect. God includes the sorts of people that we wouldn't think are worth it. Because the reality is that we are not a team unless everyone is involved. The reality is that we work together so much more efficiently when we have as many people as possible, when we don't exclude people who might be able to contribute to the good.

Matt Matesevac, the quintessential big kid in our neighborhood who modeled this sort of behavior knew what he was doing when he made certain that every kid in the neighborhood was invited. Because he knew it was important to include everyone. Because there are no highs and lows, there are just teams working together for the common good.

Our first reading today from Micah includes one of my favorite verses that inspires one of my favorite camp songs.

He has shown you, oh man, what is good, and the Lord requires of you: you're to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.

To be good in the eyes of our Lord does not mean being the best at football. It doesn't mean being the person who puts the most in the offering plate. It doesn't mean spending the most time volunteering.

Being good in the eyes of our Lord, all the way back to the days of the old prophets like Micah, means being kind, doing things that are just and fair, and being humble.

And I think that's a lot like what we learned on the sand lot all those years ago. That being part of a family, being part of a group, working together, that is the most important thing that we can do, and certainly as a church, that is our mission. To share our gifts, to include as many people as possible, not to only pick the ones who we think can do the most, but welcome people who we know can do nothing for us as well.

The more that we're able to do that, the more we make the world like what Christ wanted it to be. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers Of Intercession

P: Called together to follow Jesus, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

P: Cultivate humility in your church. In gatherings of every size, teach us to boast only in the cross. Shape your church to be people of kindness, generosity, and justice. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: The foundations of the earth bear witness to your faithfulness; the mountains and hills echo with your holiness. When we mistreat your creation, show us the error of our ways. Inspire us with reverent awe to honor all you have made. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: You make foolish the wisdom of the world. Raise up honorable leaders who seek justice, love mercy, and pursue peace. Frustrate plans that are corrupt, wicked, and self-seeking. Prosper the work of peacemakers. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: Bless all whom the world rejects. Accompany those who are regarded as foolish, weak, low, and despised; reveal your power and presence at work where it is least expected. Give your life, strength, and wisdom to all in need. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: As with your people Israel, remind this congregation of your saving acts. Remind us how your faithfulness brought us through difficulties and sustained us despite our weaknesses. Establish the cross as the center of our life together. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: Praise to you for your blessed saints in every time and place. Trusting you accompanied them in poverty, persecution, and in every trial, we trust you abide with your people always. Merciful God,

A: receive our prayer.

P: We bring to you our needs and hopes, O God, trusting your wisdom and power revealed in Christ crucified.

A: Amen.

Blessing

P: God the Creator who delights in you, Jesus the Savior who is born for you, and the lifegiving Spirit who shines on you, ✠ bless you and keep you in hope and peace.

A: Amen.